

M3 Junction 9 Improvement Examination: Deadline 1, Post-hearing submission from Cycle Winchester.

6 June 2023

Cycle Winchester is a community campaign group based in Winchester. The aim of Cycle Winchester is to make Winchester better by bike, i.e. to create a better Winchester (the city and surrounding villages) by promoting cycling as a convenient, healthy, inexpensive and environmentally-friendly way to get around, as well as to campaign for improved provision that will enable more people to cycle. In so doing, we also hope to reduce traffic congestion and pollution in order to make Winchester a more enjoyable place to live, work and visit. We are an independent group but are affiliated to Cycling UK, the national cycling charity, and two members of our team are registered members of Cycling UK's Cycling Advocacy Network (CAN).

We believe that the M3 Junction 9 redevelopment provides major opportunities to improve utility cycling, recreational cycling and green tourism in the area:

- The cycle route across the junction to Easton Lane is part of National Cycle Route 23 provides a direct link between the city and the South Downs National Park, as well as to the villages of the Itchen Valley and the market town of Alresford, but the present crossing is woefully inadequate and unsafe and is under-used as a result.
- The proposed new non-motorised route between Junction 9 and Kings Worthy would link Kings Worthy (a large and growing satellite settlement of Winchester) with the employment and retail areas of Winnall and beyond that to the city itself and the new sports and leisure centre, providing an opportunity for increased commuting, utility and leisure journeys by bike and e-bike.
- Both of the above would link into the emerging Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) network for the city and the surrounding district.
- The proposed new bridleway would provide increased opportunities for recreational offroad riding, accessible from Winchester without the need for a car journey.

Cycle Winchester is a member of a consultative group which meets regularly with the National Highways project team to review the non-motorised user aspects of this project as they develop. We have been happy with the level of discussion that has taken place with the consultative group: the project team were very open about the issues and the pros and cons of various solutions to them, and took on board feedback from ourselves and other members of the group. Some progress has been made but there are several issues still outstanding (in part issues that we thought had been resolved but which are not included in the current proposals. In particular, the following remain of concern:

- Some aspects are not clearly-enough defined, especially in terms of the legal statuses, width and surface standards of the various routes. (This is of special concern as a historic failure to record the legal status of the original cycle route through Junction 9 led to a long dispute over the status of the route and whether National Highways' predecessors had to maintain it as a cycle facility or not. That ended up in a degraded path and a compromise solution that suits no-one, where half the route across the junction is now legally a bridleway while the other half isn't.)
- Some are sub-optimal in their design e.g. an insistence on shared-use rather than segregated paths, and built to minimum allowable dimensions under National Highways' *DMRB CD 143 – Designing for walking, cycling and horseriding*. Shared-use and minimum widths are

allowed in DMRB CD 143 in situations where space precludes anything better. That isn't the case here and National Highways should be building to better than the minimum.

- We would prefer to see National Highways adopt LTN 1/20 standards, which are more up to date and reflect current expert thinking.
- It is important that the routes are future-proofed as retrospective improvements are usually impossible.
- Some aspects could benefit from further improvement (e.g. the proposed new cycle route from Kings Worthy includes an at-grade crossing of a busy motorway link road which we think could be avoided).
- National Highways could do more to fund cycling, walking and horse-riding improvements in the surrounding area as part of the scheme mitigation, for example expansion of the Watercress Way and/or improvements to the western end of the South Downs Way between the M3 and Chilcomb village.

We also have concerns about the construction process itself.

- Firstly, we want to make sure that diversions do not cause much higher traffic levels on other roads used by cyclists (especially the B3047, the B3420 Andover Road, the A272, Bar End Road and city centre routes generally).
- Secondly, we want to ensure that any closures and diversions of the existing NCN23 cycle route are minimised and are discussed in advance and clearly notified and signposted.

At the open-floor hearing on 17 May 2023, we outlined our position that:

- The M3 improvement project – if it goes ahead – should provide improved cycle infrastructure, designed and implemented to a high-standard.
- That well-used cycle routes should not be unreasonably disrupted during the construction period.

On that second point, we expressed concern that, despite assurances from National Highways that no decisions had been taken on non-motorised diversions, and that we would be consulted before any were proposed, in fact the submitted plans included a detailed diversion route during construction. The proposed diversion is both illegal and physically impossible for cyclists and equestrians to use, including as it does two public footpaths, two stiles, and a bridge with clearance so low that even pedestrians have to duck when using it. Bear in mind that this is a diversion for a well-used National Cycle Network route. We're very concerned about this, as it suggests that despite all the good work so far, National Highways is still not taking the requirements of non-motorised users seriously. As noted by other representations at the OFH, the lack of a satisfactory diversion during construction will result in residents of Easton and the Itchen Valley, who happily visit shops in Winnall by bicycle or on foot, instead getting into their cars for this short journey; the exact opposite of behaviour we want to encourage.

We were questioned by the examiners on suitable alternative diversions, and while this decision depends very much on related plans for motorised diversions, we mentioned two possible routes:

- Long Walk, Fair Lane and Alresford Road (B3404), and
- Easton Lane and Martyr Worthy Road (B3047).

Alresford Road is very busy and cyclist-hostile, so National Highways should be looking at funding mitigation measures to make it more suitable as an alternative cycle route, if that is their preferred option. Both are very much longer than the current NCN23 route, so the duration of diversionary period would need to be as short as possible. We request National Highways to document their proposed diversion – one that is legal, practical, and with appropriate mitigations for cyclists' safety – at the earliest opportunity.

Finally, we expressed a wish to participate in consultations on the SoCG in relation to "effects on the Public Rights of Way and on cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders". We were pleased that representatives of the applicant stepped forward at the end of the hearing, and offered to facilitate our participation. This has now been formalised by a Rule 8 letter from the ExA (TR010055, 25 May 2023). We are currently in the process of agreeing the issues to be included in the SoCG for cyclists.